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Raising the profile of career guidance: educational and vocational guidance practitioner

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Abstract In 2007 the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) launched the Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioner credential (EVGP) as one means of formally acknowledging the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that practitioners need in order to provide quality career development services to clients. This paper describes the foundational background to this initiative and some of the implications for training career practitioners and delivering career services.

Résumé. Renforcement du profil du conseil d'orientation: le praticien d'orientation scolaire et professionnelle (EVGP). En 2007, l'Association Internationale d'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle (AIOSP) a lancé le label Praticien d'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle (POSP) comme moyen de reconnaissance formelle des connaissances, qualifications et caractéristiques personnelles dont les praticiens doivent disposer en vue de fournir aux clients des services de développement de leur projet vocationnel qui soient de qualité. Cet article décrit le contexte dans lequel cette initiative a vu le jour et certaines des ses implications pour la formation des praticiens de l'orientation et l'offre de prestations d'orientation.

Zusammenfassung. Anhebung des professionellen Profils der Beruflichen Beratung: Praktischer Bildungs-und Berufsberater (EVGP—Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioner). Im Jahr 2007 begründete die Internationale Vereinigung für Schul-und Berufsberatung (IVSBB) die Zertifizierung zum Praktischen Bildungs- und Berufsberater (EVGP) als ein Verfahren zur formellen Anerkennung der Kenntnisse, Fertigkeiten und persönlichen Merkmale, die

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Bildungs-und Berufsberater benötigen, um eine qualitativ hochwertige Dienstleistung für ihre Klienten erbringen zu können. Dieser Artikel beschreibt den grundlegenden Hintergrund dieser Initiative sowie einige Schlussfolgerungen für die Ausbildung von Berufsberatern sowie die Durchführung von Beruflicher Beratung.

Resumen. Elevando el Perfil de la Orientación para la Carrera: el Profesional de la Orientación Educativa y Vocacional (POEV). La Asociación Internacional para la Orientación Educativa y Profesional (AIOEP), lanzó, en 2007, la iniciativa denominada “El Profesional de la Orientación Educativa y Vocacional (POEV)” como un medio de reconocer y acreditar los conocimientos, habilidades y características personales que necesitan los profesionales de la orientación para proporcionar servicios de calidad a sus clientes. En este artículo se describen los antecedentes de esta iniciativa y algunas de sus implicaciones para la formación de orientadores y la prestación de servicios de orientación.

Keywords Competence · Competencies · Training

In April 2007 the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG) launched the Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioner credential (EVGP) as one way of raising the profile of career guidance and of providing a means for those working in the career guidance field to have formal acknowledgment of the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes they utilize in providing quality services to clients. The EVGP is built on the competency framework developed by the IAEVG and formally approved by the IAEVG General Assembly in 2003 (Repetto, Malik, Ferrer-Sama, Manzano, & Hiebert, 2003).

Over the past decade, there have been many projects aimed at identifying the basis for providing quality career guidance services to clients. In some initiatives, the focus has been on the content of training programs, e.g., the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2008). In these initiatives, programs have been accredited if they contain the courses, or other learning experience, that fulfil the accreditation requirements. Other initiatives have focused on legislation. Thus, in many countries national or state regulatory bodies have been established that grant a license to practice in a professional area, based on the credentials of those seeking the license. In other initiatives the focus has been on the qualities that service providers need in order to provide quality services to clients, i.e., the competencies, or competences of service providers. A discussion of the relative merits of these approaches is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important for readers to be aware that the focus in this paper is on the third approach, namely the qualities that service providers demonstrate when providing quality services to clients. Similar projects have been undertaken by the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA, 2007), Canadian National Steering Committee (2004), American School Counselor Association (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and European Commission (Evangelista, 2007; Reid, 2007; Reid & Ford, 2008) (see Repetto, Ferrer-Sama, & Manzano, 2008 for a brief review). Typically, these projects result in a framework that

includes broad categories and more detailed micro components within those categories. The IAEVG initiative adopted a functional approach, defining areas of practice, the functions performed within those areas, and the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed to perform those functions. The IAEVG Competency Framework was developed empirically, by a research team based in Madrid, Spain, with direction from an advisory committee comprised of experts from all continents, and validated by practitioners in 41 countries. The development process and the empirical basis for the IAEVG Competency Framework has been described in detail in a previous issue of this journal (Repetto, 2008a) and the steps taken to obtain multi-national input and trans-national validation by practitioners is summarized in Repetto (2008b). The endorsement of the Competency Framework by the IAEVG General Assembly in 2003 provides further testament to the international relevance of the Competency Framework (IAEVG, 2003).

In the IAEVG initiative, a competency approach was adopted, rather than a training-based approach, to acknowledge that expertise can be obtained in many ways, including formal education, on-the-job training, and informal training such as mentoring or job shadowing. The IAEVG Competency Framework contains 11 core competencies that all practitioners should have and ten specialized sets of competencies that practitioners may or may not have depending on the requirements of their work roles. The competency framework has been detailed previously (IAEVG, 2003; Repetto, 2008a) and therefore will not be repeated here. The EVGP was developed to provide a mechanism for formally acknowledging the competencies that practitioners have acquired and are using in their jobs.

Using a competency-based approach is somewhat controversial, due in part to the non-standardized use of terminology in various projects. Sultana (2009) attempts to clarify the situation by outlining the basis for confusion. However to date, there is no uniform meaning attached to words like: competence, competences, competence framework, competence-based approach, competent, competency, competencies, competency framework, competency-based approach, etc. In some cases the terms seem to be used interchangeably, however in other cases precise meaning is attached to the different terms. Thus, for the sake of clarity, a brief aside is useful in order to clarify how the terms are used in this paper. There is no intent to imply that other definitions are incorrect. The definitions that follow are intended only to help readers attach the intended meaning to the terms used.

In this paper, "competent" refers to the ability to perform tasks at or above some predetermined level or standard of performance. "Competence" has the same meaning as "competent" but has a different grammatical use, e.g., "A person is competent to do the job" versus "A person has the competence to do the job). In this paper, the word "competencies" refers to the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes needed to perform a job with a high level of quality. Competency is the singular of competencies, and refers to the specific knowledge, or skill, or personal attribute, needed to perform a job with a high level of quality. This use of these terms is consistent with other documents (e.g., Brown, Cane, & Bryce, 2008; Canadian National Steering Committee, 2004; CICA, 2007; Hiebert, 2000). The EVGP is a credential, intended to recognize the existence of the set of competencies identified in the IAEVG framework.

The context of career-life planning

The EVGP is built on several basic foundational observations. First, is the recognition that traditional views of career guidance need to be expanded to embrace a wholistic perspective. A second basic observation deals with the nature of services that agencies offer. A third basic observation pertains to the training of practitioners offering quality career development services. These foundational observations are elaborated below.

Wholistic guidance services

People's lives are integrated and not neatly compartmentalized. Thus, there is a sense in which no career decision is *only* a career decision and every decision that a person makes has a career-related impact. Career decisions and life decisions are intertwined. Therefore, career development services need to be considered from a wholistic perspective, taking into account all aspects of human functioning, not just those related to paid employment. To emphasize this point, in many circles the term *career-life planning* is being used to identify the orientation of those providing career guidance services. In keeping with the career-life planning theme, career development can be defined as the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future (Canadian Career Development Foundation [CCDF], 2002). The focus implied in the definition is a wholistic focus, emphasizing the inter-related and integrated nature of human experience.

The spelling of the term *wholistic* in this paper is deliberate, to emphasize the whole-person nature of human experience. The author acknowledges that the spelling "holistic" is commonly used in many circles, emphasizing the connection to the Greek derivative "holos" meaning "whole." However there has been some debate about the appropriate spelling of the word, for example in the Wholistic Education Special Interest Group (WE-SIG) of the American Educational Research Association. The result of that debate has oscillated back and forth depending mostly on preferences of the people on the executive committee, sometimes using "holistic" and other times using "wholistic." More recently, there has been a strong movement, especially in the medical community and with aboriginal groups, towards the spelling "wholistic." Common phraseology now includes terms such as: wholistic health, wholistic healing, wholistic health education, wholistic business, and organizations now exist such as: Wholistic Health Solutions, Wholistic Healing Research, the Wholistic Stress Control Institute, the Wholistic Business Network, and the Wholistic Peace Institute. In the Aboriginal community, here is an emphasis on wholistic curriculum (CanTeach, 2008), wholistic approaches to policy planning (a discussion paper presented to the World Health Organization, Reading, Kmetic, & Gideon, 2007), and a wholistic approach to pandemic planning (Assembly of First Nations, 2007). Thus, in this paper the spelling "wholistic" is used to emphasize a focus on the whole-person, not just career aspects of clients seeking services.

The notion that career experiences are embedded in people's larger life experiences has received attention previously in the literature (see Van Esbroeck,

1997, 2002; Watts & Van Esbroeck, 1998). Wholistic career services place people at the centre, rather than presenting problems. The problem is seen as one aspect of a person seeking services, connected to other aspects of the person and the environments in which the person is operating. From a wholistic vantage point, career services are not limited to narrow interventions such as career choice or job placement. Inevitably, issues pertaining to career choice or job placement are embedded in a larger life-context. The contextual factors need to be identified and to the extent that they impact the process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions they need to be addressed, either by the career practitioner directly or by others in the practitioner's professional referral network.

Providing wholistic services does not mean that all practitioners must be capable of addressing all client needs. On the contrary, a wholistic approach requires openness to many professional fields such as personal guidance and counselling (for personal, health, and social issues), educational guidance and counselling (for learner support and exploring educational alternatives), and assistance in accessing relevant information. Service providers in a comprehensive, wholistic service system will have openness to understanding the connections between career issues and other factors within a person, or the environment, that may require professional intervention, and they will work in collaboration to address these issues.

Nature of career development services

A second basic observation underlying the EVGP is that people seek assistance with career-life planning for different reasons and therefore they need different types of services. Some need advice to address an immediate problem, often regarding where to find relevant information or how to use information. Advising involves providing general, "non-personalized" information regarding a particular topic or focus, e.g., describing different styles of résumés to a client, helping clients access career information, or making them aware of other career services that are available. Other people need guidance, which is more personalized service that is tailored to a client's unique needs and often is psycho-educational in nature. Guidance is broader in scope than advising and requires a service provider to first gather information about a client, often through an interview or other kind of assessment, and then to focus the services on meeting a client's particular needs. A practitioner explaining to clients how the results of an interest assessment might influence their occupational choices would be providing guidance, as would a teacher who provides psycho-educational instruction on appropriate job interviewing skills. The tailoring process in guidance increases the likelihood that services obtained are congruent with a client's unique needs and are offered within a wholistic context. Other clients need counselling, which most often is more intense service designed to help clients explore, examine, and clarify their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and behaviors to arrive at plans for action. Counselling typically addresses broader issues such as: exploring how personal values impact career direction and work-adjustment, or examining the integration of work roles with other life roles that may or may not be directly related to work (see Borgen & Hiebert, 2002, 2006; Hiebert & Borgen, 2002 for elaboration).

An important theme running through the above discussion is that people seeking assistance need different types of career services: Not more or less of the same type of service, but *different* services designed to meet different needs. Advising is most appropriate for people who are seeking information, know how to use the information when they find it, and are open to the advice they receive. Guidance can help people to consider their suitability for different career and educational opportunities, explore alternatives they may not have considered previously, and engage in appropriate decision-making about their future career-life path. Counselling is required in situations where people need to explore their attitudes related to career-life planning, their personal readiness to entertain various options, the cultural and societal contexts in which they operate, or the need to include others who may be important in the decision-making process for that person. In order to be able to meet the broad range of client needs, different types of services need to be offered, and agencies need practitioners that collectively have a broad range of competencies, keeping in mind that it is not necessary for each practitioner to be able to address all client needs. This situation is best visualized, not as a single continuum of services from less intensive to more intensive, but as overlapping circles signifying services that are different in nature, designed to meet different client needs.

Nature of practitioner training

A third basic observation underlying the EVGP derives from the above contention that most countries tend to see client services on a single continuum (from less service to more service) rather than as intersecting domains (different types of services, requiring practitioners with different types of competencies). Conceptualizing services on a single continuum tends to promote a hierarchical view of professional training and the perspective that more training is better than less, and by extension, people with a masters degree are more capable of providing career services than people with a bachelors degree or a college diploma. Such a view is contrary to the notion that people with different needs require different types of service, delivered by professionals with different types of training.

The EVGP is built on a non-hierarchical philosophy, emphasizing that all types of services are equally important for providing comprehensive and quality services to clients, and therefore, different types of training, matched to the competencies needed to deliver those services, are equally valuable (Canadian National Steering Committee, 2004; Hiebert, 2000; Repetto et al., 2003). Of course, different services may receive differing amounts of compensation, commensurate with the amount of education or training required to master the competencies involved in delivering those services. However, the non-hierarchical philosophy underlying the EVGP would emphasize that the importance of a service is not related to the amount of pay a service provider receives or the amount of training needed to deliver the service. All services are equally important in meeting the full range of client needs that an agency is likely to encounter.

Implicit in the EVGP is the belief that different types of services are best provided by people with different types of training, not necessarily more training.

For example, to provide quality career counselling, it might be necessary to have a master's degree in counselling. However, to provide quality information management services it might be better to have a bachelor's degree in library science. Similarly, to provide educational guidance a teaching credential would be appropriate, augmented by specialized knowledge and skills pertaining to career development. (Few people would suggest that mathematics should be taught by people who did not have specialized training in mathematics. In a similar way, career guidance needs to be taught by people who have specialized training in career development.) In the same vein, to provide quality placement services a college diploma in labor market information or community development might be more important than a master's degree in counselling. In order to provide the different types of services that clients are seeking, it is important for practitioners to have different (not necessarily more) training that is directed at the type of service being sought.

Summary

The EVGP embraces the idea that in order to meet the broad scope of client needs, agencies need to offer different types of services, matched to the different types of needs that service seekers demonstrate, offered by practitioners with different types of training. Furthermore, different types of services and different types of training are best viewed as non-hierarchical: no one type of training is better than another and no one type of service is better than another. In order to provide a full range of services agencies will need to be sure that amongst the staff as a collective, all competency areas are covered.

Integrating training and service delivery

The following example illustrates how the above points can come together in an integrated fashion. In many countries, people can obtain specialized training in career development from a variety of sources. This contribution provides details based on a recent survey of training options in Canada (Kalbfleisch & Burwell, 2006a, 2006b), but most readers will be able to adapt the example to the training options available in their home countries. Many colleges in Canada offer excellent 1 or 2 year programs in career development that provide graduates with a career development certificate. Many of these programs are indexed to the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners so that graduates have a gauge of the competencies they obtained and where their competencies fit in the bigger picture of compressive service provision. Some of these programs have begun to index their courses to the IAEVG International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners to provide a more global big picture. In some provinces, bachelor degrees or certificates can be obtained with specialization in career development. Finally, most universities offer graduate programs in counselling, frequently with some provision to obtain specialization in career counselling. These different types of educational preparation map nicely on

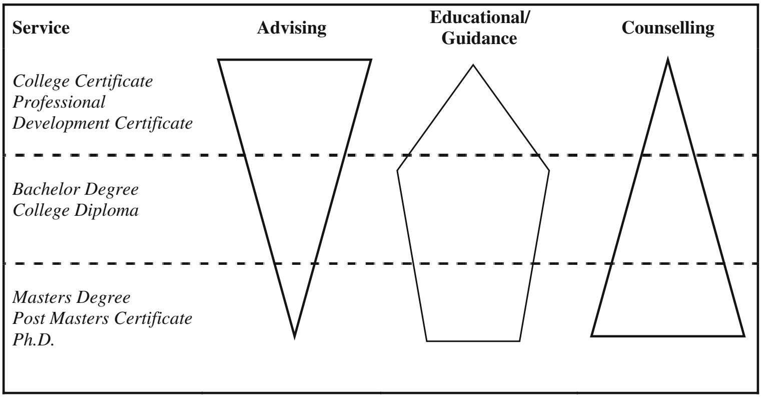


Fig. 1 Types of service corresponding to education and training. *Note*: The area inside the triangle (or pentagon) represents the proportional amount of time spent offering each type of service, by service providers with differing types of education

to the clusters of services described earlier in this paper. Figure 1 portrays the extent to which each type of service is provided by practitioners with different types of training (Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007; Magnusson, 1992). For example, advising would be done mostly by practitioners with college-level training, and to a lesser extent, by those with a bachelor's degree. A small amount of advising would be done by practitioners with graduate level training. On the other hand, counselling would be provided primarily by people with graduate education, and to a lesser extent by those with bachelor's degrees or college certificates.

To help readers understand the way in which types of training and types of service can be integrated in a non-hierarchical fashion, an alternate way of visualizing the relationship between types of services and levels of training is presented in Fig. 2, highlighting the way service providers likely would apportion their time. For example, those with college-level training likely would spend most of their time

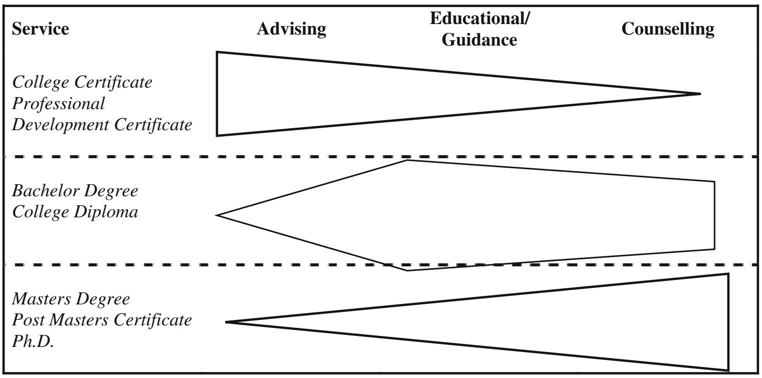


Fig. 2 Types of education and training corresponding to different types of service. *Note*: The area inside the triangle (or pentagon) represents the proportional amount of time spent by service providers with differing types of education, offering different types of service

advising. However, some college trained service providers, because of their work experience or their natural talent likely would spend some of their time offering psycho-educational services (guidance) and perhaps those with special gifts would be doing some small amount of counselling. On the other hand, those with bachelors training likely would do a smaller amount of advising, and spend most of their time in psycho-educational guidance activities Perhaps, practitioners with a bachelors degree might, if their training or talent permitted, spend some of their time providing counselling services. Graduate trained counsellors with a specialization in career counselling, likely would spend only a small amount of their time advising, some of their time providing psycho-educational services, and the majority of their time providing career counselling. Using this type of model, it is possible to see that providing comprehensive guidance and counselling services requires different types of services providers, with different types of education and training, in order to meet the wide variety of needs for which clients are seeking assistance. Figures 1 and 2 also provide a model for how practitioners with various types of training can work in harmony to provide comprehensive career services to clients.

The EVGP: raising the profile

Wholistic approaches to providing career services require a team of professionals, who collectively possess a broad constellation of competencies that permit them to provide a wide range of services to clients. The team may exist in one agency or it may be connected to a professional network utilizing convenient referral mechanisms. The EVGP is built on a competency framework that can be used to articulate the competencies (i.e., the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes) involved in providing quality career services to clients. The framework consists of core skills and knowledge that all practitioners should have regardless of their areas of practice, and specialized competencies that are applicable to a particular area of service being provided. The competency framework is provided in the annex to the monograph on international competencies for educational and vocational guidance practitioners (Repetto, 2008a, pp. 191–195). It is likely that no single practitioner will possess all the competencies in all of the areas of specialization. However for an agency to offer comprehensive services to clients, all of the specializations should be covered by the total staff complement. The EVGP provides one way for individual practitioners to obtain formal acknowledgment of the competencies they have mastered and also a means for agencies to document the collective set of competencies obtained by their staff members.

The EVGP is the result of a collaboration between IAEVG, NBCC-International (http://www.nbccinternational.org/) and the Center for Credentialing in Education (CCE, http://www.cce-global.org/). The CCE administers the EVGP on behalf of IAEVG, and close contact is maintained between the CCE staff and the IEAVG Executive Committee. The application process begins with a practitioner self-assessment indexed to the IAEVG competency framework. A template accompanies the self-assessment so that practitioners can document the evidence that supports their perception that they have attained adequate mastery of each competency.

Acknowledging that learning happens in many contexts, a wide range of supporting documentation is acceptable, including formal learning (evidenced by university of college transcripts) and informal learning such as workshops or on the job training that is linked to the competencies. Acknowledging that many people learn through experience that is not documented in any formal way, it also is possible to have supervisors complete a declaration that applicants have been observed demonstrating specific competencies at a suitable level of mastery. It also is possible for training organizations to apply to have their curricula reviewed, and if successful, to have their training "pre-cleared" as providing participants with mastery of specific competencies. Currently application materials are available in the four official languages of IAEVG, namely English, French, German, and Spanish. More information on the EVGP application process can be obtained form the IAEVG web site (http://www.iaevg.org) under the "About IAEVG" window, or by connecting to the appropriate CCE link directly (http://www.cce-global.org/review-management/evgp).

Recently the IAEVG has begun discussions with other professional organizations regarding the possibility for reciprocal recognition of the qualification processes developed by other organizations, as a first step towards creating a common, or equivalent, method for professional recognition. Given that career guidance services are part of the mandates of many professional organizations whose members come from diverse backgrounds, it likely is not realistic, and perhaps also not advisable, to attempt to develop a common system for acknowledging professional competence in the career guidance field. However, working towards a system that permits reciprocal acknowledgment of professional credentials is an important first step in that direction.

Concluding comments

Career-related decisions have far-reaching impacts on the lives of people and are amongst the most important decisions that people make; second only perhaps to one's choice of mate or life partner. At one time career decisions could be left to individuals, for economies were buoyant, jobs were plentiful, and the consequences of questionable decisions were not severe. However, in the global economy we experience today, this is no longer the reality. Career-related decisions are exceedingly more complicated and have broad and long term consequences that are not always obvious. Countries need citizens who are able to make the best use of their talents and make career choices that will keep them motivated and productive contributors to the social and economic well-being of the societies in which they live (CCDF, 1993). However, the context in which career decisions occur today is so complex that many people require assistance in exploring alternatives, weighing the consequences associated with various options, and creating a career plan that will help to give focus to their lives, while remaining responsive to the ever-changing world in which people live.

In such a context, inter-professional collaboration is important because career guidance services are provided by professionals from diverse backgrounds (including counselling, psychology, education, social work, human resource management, etc.) working in many fields (including education, government,

community agencies, not-for-profit organizations, out-placement, work-force integration, etc.). The needs of clients seeking assistance with career-life planning remain paramount and divers. Those needs are best met from a wholistic orientation that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all facets for clients' lives. With the emphasis on lifelong learning becoming more prominent, the need for lifelong guidance will continue to grow (Van Esbroeck, 2002).

Currently, there are few venues for those working in the career guidance field to obtain formal recognition for the competencies they use when offering career services to clients. The EVGP is one means of providing that formal recognition to practitioners. The EVGP is built on the competency framework deriving from research base (see Repetto, 2008a). The processes involved in the EVGP were developed over several years through collaboration with several professional groups operating in a variety of countries. The collaboration continues with the exploration of reciprocal recognition agreements with other professional associations. The IAEVG remains committed to working with other organizations to create a united voice for career guidance and mutual recognition of professional education, and in doing so, to raise the profile of educational and vocational guidance in the world.

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